

## Bible Study Romans 15

*“15:1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”*

Who were *“the weak”*? They appear to be brothers and sisters in Christ but are immature in the faith. Elsewhere Paul addresses such people: *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3:1). Peter also addresses them *“...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby...”* (2 Peter 2:2).

It is important to realize that ‘the weak’ and ‘babes in Christ’ are not morally deficient in any way. They are merely earlier on their path to deification. Those who are more mature in the faith must not attack them, which leads to their discouragement, but help them along that path with patience.



This verse mentions, *“the scruples of the weak.”* One of the signs of spiritual immaturity is a misguided preoccupation with inconsequential matters. Christ reprimanded the Pharisees for this. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith”* (Matthew 23:23). When “the weak” or the “babes in Christ” have “scruples” about an issue, they may be correct. The problem is not one of right and wrong, but of balance and priorities. Christ concluded in the above verse, *“These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”*

*“2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”*

More mature Christians must beware of pride when they patiently help the less mature Christians along the way. The purpose of our help must not be to congratulate ourselves how mature we are and compare ourselves positively against the less mature. The purpose must not about us but about them, and how much they grow.

*“<sup>4</sup> For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”*

When Paul is saying “we” and “our” in this verse, he is still talking to the more mature Christians. He is urging us to be students of the Scriptures. We are never too spiritually advanced to read the Bible and strive to practice what it teaches. If we do so, we will not only learn, we will also develop patience and comfort. Today, if we are looking for more peace and comfort in our lives, Scripture reading is a good place to cultivate it.

*“<sup>5</sup> Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

From the context of this verse, the like-mindedness being sought is between the more mature and the less mature in Christ. And that like-mindedness can be advanced by reading and sharing the Scripture. That is one of the great values of group Bible study. I have spent much of my life studying the Scripture, and I share them with the Bible Study class, but I often learn from the insights offered by the students and their biblical insights. This can lead to a wonderful sense of “like mindedness” in the group.

As we have seen before in the book of Romans, Paul is addressing a mixture of Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. Sometimes he is more directly addressing one, sometimes he is addressing the other. With this theme of Scripture and like-mindedness in mind he addresses both emphasizing their unity in Christ:

*“<sup>7</sup> Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. <sup>8</sup> Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, <sup>9</sup> and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy...”*

He cites biblical examples of those promises that God made to the Jews that one day the Gentiles would join them as the people of God:

*“...as it is written:*

*“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,  
And sing to Your name.”*

*<sup>10</sup> And again he says:*

*“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!”*

*<sup>11</sup> And again:*

*“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!  
Laud Him, all you peoples!”*

The above quote from Psalm 117:1 is sung as a refrain at every Pascha Midnight Service.

*<sup>12</sup> And again, Isaiah says:*

*“There shall be a root of Jesse;  
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,  
In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”*

The uniting of the Jews and Gentiles into one Church should not be a source of suspicion by either side, but rather a source of like-minded worship and celebration.

*“<sup>13</sup> Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Unity of faith shared by the entire community has beneficial results. Paul says it leads to joy, peace, hope and fulness of the Holy Spirit. This same unity of our shared faith, and its spiritual benefits are highlighted in every liturgy when we recite the Creed together. Note that this unity of faith is a reflection of the unity of the Holy Trinity.

**Priest:** Let us love one another, that with oneness of mind we may confess:

**Choir:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Trinity, One in essence and undivided.

**People:** I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible...

As the book of Romans begins to wind down, Paul takes a personal tone.

*“<sup>14</sup> Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. <sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God.”*

He summarizes why he wrote the letter in the first place – to unite the Gentile believers to the Jewish believers in one community of worship.

*“<sup>16</sup> that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*

Paul identifies himself as an apostle to the Gentiles elsewhere in the New Testament. He tells Timothy, “...for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1 Timothy 2:7). In Galatians 2:7 he recounts how he was appointed to this apostolate while others were sent to the Jews:

*“But on the contrary, when they [i.e. the other apostles] saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”*

*“<sup>17</sup> Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me...”*

With these responsibilities in mind, he makes sure he “stays in his lane,” and leaves the Jewish mission field to those other apostles who were called to them. His focus would remain, “... *in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient...*”

*“<sup>19</sup> ... in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”*



The book of Acts describes Paul’s journeys and itineraries. It does not mention him visiting Illyricum specifically. He might have made a side trip when he visited nearby Macedonia, which is mentioned in Acts 20:2. “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.”

*“Count up all the places Paul had been – not just in the Roman Empire but beyond its frontiers as well: Phoenicia, Syria, Cileisia, and Cappadocia for a start. But also the back country – Arabia, Persia and Armenia. This is why he said ‘far round as Illyricum’ so that*



*you would not only think of the direct route from Jerusalem to Illyricum but consider all also all the surrounding countries as well” (John Chrysostom).*

### Map of Paul’s 3 Missionary Journeys



*<sup>20</sup> And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written: “To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.” <sup>22</sup> For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.”*

*“The explanation as to why Paul had not yet managed to visit the Romans is he believed that Peter had already come to them as their teacher, so he went to places where as yet no one had preached the Gospel of Christ” (Gennadius of Constantinople).*

*“<sup>23</sup> But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”*

Much of the book of Romans is devoted to the relationship between the Gentile and Jewish Christians. That was a potentially difficult relationship, but Paul and the other apostles led the early Church through it. Macedonia and Achaia were Greek provinces that would have been heavily Gentile. Yet they raised money for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Here is a beautiful example of the Christian love that was established between them. At the time of his writing, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver those alms.

*“<sup>28</sup>Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. <sup>29</sup>But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”*

*“It is not certain that Paul ever got to Spain... they did not need to come to faith, but only strengthened in the faith” (John Chrysostom).*

*“<sup>30</sup>Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, <sup>31</sup>that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe...”*

Paul had good reason to be concerned for his safety. The book of Acts records many attempts on his life by the Jews in Jerusalem.

*“... and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, <sup>32</sup>that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. <sup>33</sup>Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”*